

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 004046

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/08/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [MOPS](#) [ET](#) [ER](#) [EE](#) [BORDER](#) [UNSC](#)

SUBJECT: UNMEE OFFICIALS AWAITING GUIDANCE ON ERITREA'S REQUEST TO EXPEL PEACEKEEPERS

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 4044

[¶](#)B. ASMARA 1171 (NOTAL)

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES VICKI HUDDLESTON. REASON: 1.4 (D).

[¶](#)11. (C) SUMMARY. Eritrea's demand that American, Canadian, and European (including Russian) UNMEE staff depart within 10 days could affect Ethiopia's previous commitment to withdraw troops from the border, senior UNMEE officials say. UNMEE is awaiting guidance from New York on whether to comply with or to reject the GSE's request, the latest in a series of restrictions imposed since October. Were UNMEE to comply, it would not only directly affect nearly half of UNMEE's military observers, but also hamper missionwide transportation and logistics. In the absence of a formal status of mission agreement, UN legal officials are reviewing the June 2000 cessation of hostilities agreement to determine whether Eritrea can require host-country approval of staff serving in a Chapter VI peacekeeping mission. India's ambassador to Ethiopia has discussed the possibility of replacing staff with those of unaffected nationalities, rather than withdrawal from UNMEE. END SUMMARY.

[¶](#)12. (SBU) On the afternoon of December 7, following an earlier briefing for NATO ambassadors (ref A), Addis Ababa-based officials of the UN Mission for Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) briefed Western European missions, Bulgaria, Canada, the U.S., and UNSC members Tanzania and Algeria on the Government of the State of Eritrea's (GSE) December 6 decision to expel Western nationals serving in UNMEE. Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (DSRSG) Amb. Azouz Ennifar said that GSE Acting Commissioner for Coordination with the UN Peacekeeping Mission Col. Zecarias Ogbagaber had informed UNMEE on the evening of December 6 that "all members of UNMEE" holding U.S., Canadian, European, or Russian nationality should leave UNMEE within 10 days, "irrespective of the sector of their activity." Eritrea had provided no further explanation, Ennifar said. Amb. Ennifar said the request had been forwarded to UN headquarters in New York, and characterized it as a continuation of a decision taken by the GSE two months earlier to impose incrementally tighter restrictions on UNMEE and its freedom of movement. UNMEE Spokeswoman Gail Bindley-Taylor Sainte said UNHQ would likely prepare a statement for release by the UNSYG.

ETHIOPIA MAY RECONSIDER REDEPLOYING TROOPS AWAY FROM BORDER

[¶](#)13. (SBU) Amb. Ennifar said that upon informing Ethiopia's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Tekeda Alema this morning of Eritrea's request, Tekeda responded that Ethiopia would not be provoked, and that Ethiopia's decision last week (following UNSCR 1640) to withdraw its troops along the border to positions held in December 2004 would be "examined in the context of these new conditions." Ennifar commented that he believed that Ethiopia would implement a partial withdrawal -- withdrawing only in areas where Ethiopia assessed that Eritrea did not pose a risk.

[¶](#)14. (SBU) Amb. Ennifar noted that at the November 25 meeting in Nairobi of the Military Coordination Commission, the only active mechanism for discussions between Ethiopia and Eritrea, Eritrea had rejected UNSCR 1640 for failing to resolve underlying issues. He said that while Ethiopia had committed to withdraw troops to positions held in December 2004, Eritrea had asserted that the directive to withdraw troops did not apply to Eritrea, as Eritrea claimed it had not moved any troops into the TSZ.

WOULD CURTAIL FIXED-WING OPERATIONS AND HALF OF UNMEE'S MILOBS

[¶](#)15. (SBU) DSRSG Ennifar said that the GSE's request would directly apply to approximately 150 UNMEE personnel in Eritrea: 90 out of 220 military observers, as well as approximately 50-60 civilian staff in Asmara. However, indirect consequences would include hampering mission communications and logistics, he said, noting that UNMEE's chief of administration was Russian. Ennifar also expressed concern that if the UN considered the GSE's request to apply

to UNMEE contractors as well as personnel, then it would hamper demining operations and possibly curtail UNMEE's fixed wing air operations (as Ukrainian air crews operate two Antonov aircraft based in Asmara).

16. (SBU) In response to questions from Western diplomats, Ennifar said it was "too early" to discuss whether the GSE's request would require UNMEE to additional posts (18 out of 40 have been closed since the GSE's October flight ban) in the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ). Whether UNMEE would comply and seek to substitute staff of either nationalities, or protest the decision, would depend on the UNSC's decision, he said. "It is completely in the hands of the Security Council," Ennifar said. He said the new restrictions were intended to put further pressure on the international community to address border demarcation, and that he believed that the GSE did not want UNMEE to leave. If Eritrea wanted UNMEE to leave, it would simply direct UNMEE to do so, he said. Asked to identify UNMEE's red-lines, Ennifar said UNMEE would have to reconsider its presence only when personnel's safety was at risk, or when it was reduced to so few personnel that it would be impossible to fulfill its mandate.

17. (SBU) Further restrictions by the GSE were likely, according to UNMEE Head of Political Affairs and Principal Political Advisor Amb. Leandre Bassole, based in Asmara but visiting Addis Ababa. Amb. Bassole said that when the GSE announced its ban on UNMEE helicopter flights, GSE officials had explicitly linked the move with a desire to prod the UNSC to act on border demarcation, and had said that additional restrictions could be imposed in the future. DSRSG Ennifar noted that beginning with the flight ban imposed two weeks after the GSE's minister of finance's belligerent address to the UNGA on September 23, the GSE had placed an increasing number of restrictions on UNMEE: affecting not only its freedom of movement (restricting time and locations), but also measures that harassed UNMEE staff (e.g., forbidding UNMEE's PX to import shipping containers, and requiring departing UNMEE staff to provide receipts for all personal effects).

LEGAL BASIS OF ERITREA'S REQUEST UNCLEAR

18. (SBU) UN legal experts were reviewing the June 2000 cessation of hostilities agreement (S/2000/601) and the December 2000 Algiers accord, although neither agreement provides much detail, to determine whether there was a legal basis for Eritrea's request, Ennifar said. He observed that the June 2000 agreement may refer to consent of host countries, but that while the SRSG had to be approved by both countries, whether the composition of peacekeeping mission staff was subject to formal host-country approval remained an open question, he said. Ennifar noted that UNMEE had operated until now without any formal status of mission agreement with the GSE, and had previously subjected composition of personnel to host-country approval.

19. (SBU) Amb. Bassole commented that Eritrea's request was "directed against Western countries." He noted that it came five years after the establishment of UNMEE, and therefore was without precedent. Canada's ambassador said Canada was at a loss to explain its inclusion in Eritrea's expulsion order, as it was minimally involved in the border situation, but believed that Eritrea was likely protesting former Canadian foreign minister Lloyd Axworthy's tenure as UN Special Envoy for Ethiopia and Eritrea.

110. (SBU) UN peacekeeping missions operating under Chapter VI of the UN Charter typically require host country approval, Ennifar said. However, were the UNSC to decide to change UNMEE's mandate to Chapter VII (i.e., peace enforcement), then "they (Eritrea) cannot reject it," he said.

NO TALK OF WITHDRAWING FROM TROOP CONTRIBUTING COUNTRIES

111. (SBU) Troop contributing countries (principally Jordan and India) have given no official reaction to the GSE's request, Ennifar said, but share concerns about the safety of their personnel. Amb. Bassole reported that India's ambassador to Ethiopia had met with UNMEE officials and had proposed that UNMEE examine: (1) the possible replacement of those asked to leave with staff from other nationalities, and (2) redeploying affected staff from Eritrea to Ethiopia.

112. (C) Amb. Ennifar informed poloff that UNMEE has contingency plans, established earlier, for evacuation from Eritrea, but none for reinforcing its mission or for substituting staff. He also observed that Eritrea's action was directed against all P-5 members except China (which has both MILOBS and civilian staff assigned to UNMEE), and asserted that China had recently provided arms to Eritrea.

DSRSG Ennifar also noted that as of December 6 (prior to the GSE's announcement), UNMEE observers had not yet confirmed any Ethiopian withdrawal from border areas. Troop movements north from Mekele (in Tigray) to the border had ceased, but no Ethiopian troops had been seen withdrawing south, he said.

¶13. (C) COMMENT: Allied missions are concerned that even if Eritrea's move is legally justified, it establishes a bad precedent. Senior UNMEE officials are awaiting guidance on whether to comply with the GSE's request (but circumvent its effects by substituting personnel from other UN missions), or to reject it. The UN has some ability to transfer assets among peacekeeping missions: Ennifar noted that following the GSE's October ban on air operations, UNMEE transferred helicopters to MONUC in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

END COMMENT.

HUDDLESTON